

RIVER NOTES

A Newsletter of the Carlsbad Project Water Operations and Water Supply Conservation EIS
June 2006

Where can I view the FEIS?

The FEIS is available for public review on the project Web site at <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/albuq/library/eis/carlsbad/carlsbad.html>.

Printed copies of the FEIS are available for public inspection and review at the following locations:

Bureau of Reclamation

Albuquerque Area Office
555 Broadway NE, Suite 100
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102

Carlsbad Irrigation District

201 South Canal Street
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88220

Printed copies of the FEIS also have been provided to the following libraries:

Albuquerque Public Library (Main)

Carlsbad Public Library
Fort Sumner Public Library
Moise Memorial Library
(Santa Rosa)

Roswell Public Library
Santa Fe Public Library
New Mexico State Library
(Santa Fe)

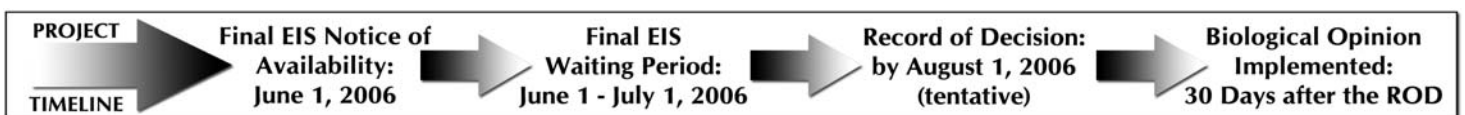
The FEIS has been sent to agencies and major stakeholders. Each printed FEIS includes a CD with the entire FEIS, attachments, and appendices. Please call Marsha Carra at the Bureau of Reclamation for further information, at (505) 462-3602, or send her an e-mail at mcarra@uc.usbr.gov.

Final Environmental Impact Statement Released

The Bureau of Reclamation and the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC) have announced the release of the Carlsbad Project Water Operations and Water Supply Conservation Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Reclamation and NMISC prepared the FEIS to assess the potential consequences of proposed changes in Carlsbad Project water operations and water acquisitions in the Pecos River Basin. The proposed changes in water operations are designed to conserve the Pecos bluntnose shiner and its designated critical habitat. The FEIS includes a description of alternative means of implementing the proposed federal action, including a no action alternative, and is an evaluation of the potential environmental, economic, and social consequences that could result. Efforts to conserve the shiner through changes in operations can affect the amount of Carlsbad Project water available for delivery to irrigators. Without an accompanying program to acquire and provide water, the Carlsbad Project water supply would be reduced. A variety of water acquisition options were analyzed as part of the EIS process.

Reclamation and the NMISC have selected the Taiban Constant Alternative as the preferred alternative. This alternative proposes to operate the Carlsbad Project with a target flow of 35 cubic feet per second (cfs) at the Taiban Gage and to deliver stored Carlsbad Project water contracted for irrigation, consistent with applicable federal and state laws. Reclamation will acquire additional water for the Carlsbad Project and will cooperate with other agencies to avoid intermittent flow of the Pecos River water. Water would be acquired from willing sellers, and existing water priorities and obligations would be respected.

The FEIS incorporates internal comments and those of other agencies and the public that Reclamation and NMISC received on the Draft EIS. All comments were carefully considered and revisions were made to the document, where appropriate. Formal public comments, along with Reclamation's responses, are included in the FEIS as Attachment 1. The Adaptive Management Plan included in the Draft EIS has been revised and refocused on the Taiban Constant Alternative. Input received from the US Fish and Wildlife Service during the Section 7 consultation process has also been incorporated. The 10-year biological opinion governing water operation on the Pecos River has been added as Appendix 1. The record of decision (ROD) is expected after a 30-day waiting period. The ROD identifies the alternatives considered, summarizes the major issues and considerations, identifies commitments made to reduce environmental effects, and documents the decision formally. Publishing a ROD is the final step in the process.



Reclamation Completes Section 7 Consultation

Under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, Reclamation is required to consult with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) when there is the potential for its actions to affect federally listed species and designated critical habitats. While the Pecos River Basin includes many species that are federally protected, the shiner and the interior least tern, a bird that was observed nesting near Brantley Reservoir in 2004, are the only species that are likely to be affected by Carlsbad Project operations. Two noncontiguous river reaches, totaling approximately 101 miles of the Pecos River, have been designated as critical habitat for the shiner.

The result of this consultation is a biological opinion (BO), prepared by the USFWS, on the effects of Carlsbad Project operations on the shiner and interior least tern over the next 10 years. With the proposed changes in water operations, voluntary conservation measures, and implementation of required “reasonable and prudent measures,” the USFWS does not expect the level of take of (or harm to) these species or critical habitat to jeopardize their continued existence. If Reclamation’s actions and conditions remain the same and commitments are met, the BO will allow Carlsbad Project water operations to continue until 2016 without further consultation. The new BO is included as Appendix 1 of the FEIS and is scheduled to be implemented 30 days after the ROD.

Key Commitments of the Biological Opinion

The BO includes conservation measures that were proposed by Reclamation and “reasonable and prudent measures” required by the USFWS. Some of these actions may need to be done in cooperation with other agencies and require additional permitting, consultations, authorization, and impact analysis. These measures are focused on avoiding intermittency, supplementing base flows, and providing habitat for the shiner and interior least tern.

Conservation Measures:

- Continue the forbearance program;
- Work closely with irrigation districts to maintain continuous flows;
- Maintain the fish conservation pool;
- Develop a water banking/exchange program;
- Lease and pump groundwater to supplement base flows in the river;
- Implement the adaptive management plan;
- Fund and assist in the capture and holding of shiner in a refugia, if necessary; and
- Work with other agencies to monitor and protect least tern nests.

Reasonable and Prudent Measures:

- Work with other agencies to restore functioning channel and floodplain habitat;

- Intensively monitor flows of less than 10 cfs at the Acme gage;
- Continue monitoring shiner populations;
- Survey and monitor least tern nesting and brooding habitat; and
- Continue normal maintenance activities at Brantley Reservoir, such as vegetation clearing that may create habitat that is attractive to the least tern.

For further information on the BO, contact Gary Dean at (505) 462-3601 gdean@uc.usbr.gov. The BO is included as Appendix 1 of the FEIS and is available for public review on the project Web site:

www.usbr.gov/uc/albuquerque/library/eis/carlsbad/carlsbad.html

What’s Next?

After a waiting period of at least 30 days, Reclamation will issue a Record of Decision, or ROD, in which it will identify the actions and environmental commitments that will be implemented.